The Washington Post
1150 15TH STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20071
(202) 334-6000

STEPHEN S. ROSENFELD
DEPUTY EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR
334-7478

November 15, 1991

Mr. Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21702

Dear Mr. Weisberg,

I read your letter carefully. For some years I have been puzzling over how to respond to people - Americans and Israelis - who consult their fears - which are my fears - more than their hopes. I could say, after you deem me unrealistic and (implicitly) naive, that you are unrealistic and overwhelmed by history, but that answer does not satisfy me and I don't suppose it will satisfy you. The view that you attribute to me of (mindlessly) conveying administration "propaganda" is, as doubtless you know, the view of perhaps half the Israeli population. I would be equally justified in suggesting that you are talking Likud "propaganda" - an offensive word, Mr. Weisberg. But of course - and I try to consider this - you could be right.

We have very different ideas of who the Arabs are and whether they are capable of modernizing their views and, even more, their societies. These are differences which are the familiar stuff of debate in Israel but, unfortunately, not so familiar here. I guess it comes down to the question of whether one finds sufficient evidence, by word, deed, feel or what have you, that Arabs can join the modern world. I have long been impressed by the example of Egypt, previously thought to be beyond compromise and change. I talk to many Palestinians and other Arabs on a regular basis, and to many Israelis, and I observe the evolution of the thinking, in different degrees, of many of them, Israelis as well as Arabs.

I read again your suggestion that my and the newspaper's words might make another Holocaust possible - a very grave thing to charge. I do not doubt that this represents your considered view, but frankly, it puts your thinking utterly beyond my reach or reply. I fear that any reassurance I offered you would be received as evidence of my fundamental inability to cope with your allegation. It strikes me, however, that your concern about my views must be very small next to your concern about Shamir's, Likud's and Israel's, who - all of them - are proceeding on a path which I commend. Your objection is not so much to my position as to the Israeli government's policy, for all I have said is that I hope that policy succeeds.

Sincerely,

Stephen Rosenfeld